

Indoor vs. Outdoor and Enrichment

For the health and safety of HSWM cats, we ask that adopters keep them indoors. Indoor-only cats live to an average of 16 years, while indoor-outdoor cats have lifespans of only about half that due to tragedies such as:

- Being hit by a car
- Ingesting toxins such as antifreeze or rodent poison
- Being attacked by another animal
- Contracting disease from another animal
- Being trapped and relocated by unhappy neighbors
- Becoming lost and unable to find the way home
- Encountering cruelty

Aside from the more obvious dangers, indoor-outdoor cats tend to bring home parasites such as fleas, ticks, roundworms, and toxoplasmosis. Many of these parasites are transferable to humans.

There are also environmental concerns that come with free-roaming cats. Wild bird species are in decline across the country, largely due to habitat loss. However, domestic cats are considered an invasive species and they kill at least a billion wild birds in the United States every year. West Michigan wildlife rescues intake thousands of injured cat-caught birds annually. Unfortunately, even with the help of experienced rehabilitators, cat-caught birds have very low chances of survival.

There are many ways to keep your cat happy and healthy indoors. To provide environmental and interactive enrichment:

- Use a wand toy to play with your cat daily. Rather than flinging the toy at the cat, move it as prey would move and give them opportunities to catch it
- Rather than free-feeding, portion your cat's meals into store-bought or DIY foraging puzzles
- Provide a pet fountain to encourage adequate water intake
- Marinate cat toys in sealed containers of catnip or valerian root powder and rotate them frequently. Cats get bored when the same toys are always out.
- Bring the outdoors indoors: give them a log to scratch or a cardboard box full of leaves to smell and play in
- Provide cat trees and/or climbing shelves for your cat to jump, scratch and sleep on
- Hang suction-cup bird feeders outside windows for safe, bird-friendly entertainment

- “Hide” treats around the house (on windowsills or cat trees, inside paper bags or toilet paper rolls, etc.)
- Blow catnip bubbles in front of your cat (not right at her!) for her to watch and/or pop. Recommend SmartyKat brand.
- Buy or grow (it’s so easy to grow) cat grass for your cat to munch on

You can also give your cat safe outdoor access by building or buying a catio and attaching it to a window of your home. Make sure it has a roof as cats are excellent climbers.

Adventure cats are becoming increasingly popular on the internet but most cats are stressed in new environments and won’t take to a leash and harness easily. Even very confident cats need some training and the proper harness before going on a tethered walk with you outside. Interested in a cat who may enjoy leash-walking? See “How to Train Your Cat to Walk on a Leash” and talk to cattery staff about possible candidates.